



Justin P. Wilson, Comptroller

March 17, 2020

Former Knox County Schools CTE Director Indicted for Theft

An investigation by the Tennessee Comptroller's Office, working in conjunction with the Knox County Sheriff's Department, has resulted in the indictment of Charles Don Lawson, the former director of Knox County Schools Career Technical Education (CTE) program.

The investigation began after Knox County school system officials notified the Comptroller's Office of unusual CTE transactions. The CTE program provides students with vocational skills in several disciplines including automotive maintenance and vehicle repair.



Investigators determined that Lawson used his school system purchasing card to buy \$9,752 worth of parts for vehicles that neither CTE nor other Knox County School departments had in their vehicle fleet. The majority of these parts were purchased for Lawson's personal use. These purchases included an engine and transmission for a 2007 Nissan Murano that was subsequently titled to Lawson.

Lawson also removed school assets from school property totaling at least \$26,009. Investigators discovered that at least 11 trailers, two ATVs, one Camaro, and one engine were missing from school property. In May 2019, Lawson advised Knox County Sheriff's detectives that some of these missing items could be found on properties belonging to his relatives. The other missing assets have not been located.

Knox County Schools placed Lawson on paid administrative leave on July 21, 2017, placed him on unpaid administrative leave on August 23, 2017, and removed him from his position on November 17, 2017.

In March 2020, Charles Don Lawson was indicted by the Knox County Grand Jury on one count of theft over \$10,000.

"This investigation highlights a clear need for improved oversight," said Comptroller Justin P. Wilson. "School and county officials must ensure that proper scrutiny is given to purchasing card transactions. Officials should perform a detailed review of all purchases made and institute a comprehensive inventory system to ensure assets are not missing."

To view the investigative report, go to: <https://comptroller.tn.gov/office-functions/investigations/find.html>

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Media contact: John Dunn, Director of Communications, 615.401.7755 or john.dunn@cot.tn.gov

